

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN
USIA WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 0151

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN MEDIA SUMMARY FOR JANUARY 7

1. MEDIA LED WITH RECENT STATEMENTS OF LEBANESE LEADERS
PRAISING SYRIA'S ROLE IN COUNTRY AND WARNING OF NEED TO
TIGHTEN SECURITY. PAPERS HEADLINED: "SARKIS PRAISES
SYRIA'S HONORABLE ROLE IN LEBANON; AL-HUSS: GIVING FREE
REIN TO IRRESPONSIBLE PENS HINDERS MARCH OF PEACE."
ARTICLES DEALT WITH MEETING PRES. SARKIS HELD WITH ARAB
AMBASSADORS NEW YEAR'S DAY, STRESSING NEED FOR AID AND
DECLARING THAT "FREEDOM WITHOUT A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY
CAN BE SELF-DESTRUCTIVE."

2. DAMASCUS RADIO ON MORNING NEWS REPORTED MEETING
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OF QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE ON QUESTION OF HEAVY
WEAPONS AND QUOTED INFORMED SOURCES TO EFFECT THAT
CRUCIAL DECISION ON ISSUE WOULD BE TAKEN WITH THE
LIKELIHOOD THAT FORCE WOULD BE USED IN EVENT PROGRESS
TOWARD PEACE IS HAMPERED.

3. PRESS REPORTED FONMIN KHADDAM STATEMENT MADE PRIOR TO HIS

AND PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI'S DEPARTURE FROM AMMAN (JAN. 5) THAT JOINT SYRO-JORDANIAN COMMITTEE ON "UNITY ACTION" WAS CONTINUING ITS WORK WITH VIEW TOWARD REACHING AGREEMENT ON PROPOSAL FOR SUBMISSION TO HEADS OF TWO STATES.

4. EDITORIALS CONTINUED DRAW COMFORT FROM ISRAEL'S CURRENT INTERNAL POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES AND ONCE AGAIN ATTACKED IRAQ. COLUMNIST PROFESSED SEE IN SUICIDE MINHOUSING AVRAHAM OFER BEGINNING OF BREAKDOWN IN ISRAELI IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT POLICIES. HE CALLED ON ARAB NATION TO CONFRONT ISRAELI IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT WITH SAME UNIFIED ACTION WITH WHICH IT SEEKS CONFRONT ZIONIST "EXPANSION AND AGGRESSION."

5. IN BREAK FROM NORMAL PRACTICE, AL-BAATH'S LEAD EDITORIAL CRITICIZED MEMBER OF GOVT, ATTACKING IN SHARP TERMS MINISTER OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC UTILITIES OVER AN ISSUE THE PAPER HAD ITSELF PREVIOUSLY RAISED -- ALLEGED CONTAMINATION OF PUBLIC DRINKING WATER IN COASTAL CITY OF BANIAS. COLUMNIST CLAIMED SCORES OF PEOPLE IN CITY FELL ILL WITH TYPHOID AND DIARRHEA AND CRITICIZED MINISTER'S DENIAL AS FLIMSY COVER-UP ATTEMPT.

6. COMMENT: CRITICISM OF MINISTER OR OFFICIAL POLICY RARELY APPEARS IN SYRIAN PRESS IN CONTEXT OF SIGNED COLUMN, BUT RATHER NORMALLY CONTAINED IN READER COMPLAINT COLUMNS. WHETHER THIS IS ISOLATED DISPUTE BETWEEN MINISTER AND PIQUED COLUMNIST, OR PORTENDS SOMEWHAT MORE LATITUDE FOR PRESS CRITICISM OF GOVT. INEFFICIENCY REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
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